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Farmers learn hot alternative to growing tobacco

WELDING SKILLS CAN COME IN HANDY DOWN ON THE FARM

ASSOCIATED PRESS

COALTON -- Former tobacco farmers in northeastern Kentucky are getting some new skills that will most likely help them save money.

The farmers are learning the basics of welding in a course at Ashland Community and Technical College. College spokesman John McGlone said the course is funded with tobacco buyout money -- funds set aside to help with the transition to other income sources or to farm more efficiently, The Independent of Ashland reported.

Greenup County farmer Dusty Haight is glad he took the course. He has built a trailer that he hauls behind his Chevy pickup.

It may not be much to look at, but he's proud of it anyway.

The frame came from a derelict camper. He put it on an axle and rusty springs from a Model A Ford, welding every joint himself.

A little more than a month ago, Haight didn't know much about welding. He and 11 other farmers are learning the basics.

The first four weeks of the eight-week course are devoted to basic techniques, said instructor Curtis Bowman. By the fifth week, the farmers were moving into more advanced topics, Bowman said.

Like Haight, many of them already have built utility trailers or other implements they'll use on the farm.

They're also looking forward to putting their new skills to work on equipment they already have.

Farming tools take a pounding, with dragging in the dirt to plant and harvest crops, Haight said.

"When we break something, we'll be able to fix it ourselves," he said. "I'll save a lot of money."

"There's always something breaking down," said Greg Graham of Greenup County.

Graham doesn't see welding as a career in itself; he already has a job. He's mainly interested in the applications around his place.

"There's so much you can do with it," he said.

The course has a major fringe benefit. Once they complete the course, the students will

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take home their own welders, worth around \$600 each, Bowman said.
